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Crime chief takes 5th in assassination probe

United Press International

WASHINGTON — Santo Trafficante Jr., once the overlord of syndicate gambling in Cuba, yesterday refused to answer a special House committee's questions about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy or plots to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.

Trafficante is the only survivor among three underworld figures described in earlier congressional testimony as being enlisted by the CIA in 1960 to kill Castro. The other two were killed, and the murders remained unsolved.

ASked if he had been threatened concerning his appearance, Trafficante refused to reply, citing constitutional protection under the 5th Amendment against self-incrimination.

"I refuse to answer on my constitutional rights," the gray-haired Tampa resident responded to 15 questions from the lawyer heading the House's investigation of the deaths of Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Finally, Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio), chairman of the House assassinations committee, reminded Trafficante he could be cited for contempt of Congress in refusing to respond. Stokes then told him he could go but might be recalled later.

Trafficante, Sam Giancana and John Rosselli were mentioned in previous testimony as being approached by the CIA in the 1960s to develop plans to kill Castro. The committee is trying to find out if there is any connection between the Castro plot and possible retaliation against Kennedy which might have led to his death.

Giancana was shot in his suburban Chicago home in 1975 shortly after Senate investigators tried to question him about the plot and Rosselli was found dead in an oil drum in Biscayne Bay near Miami in 1976 after testifying before a Senate committee.

Questions asked by committee counsel Richard Sprague which Trafficante refused to answer included:

— Had he ever been connected with the CIA or any other Federal agency?

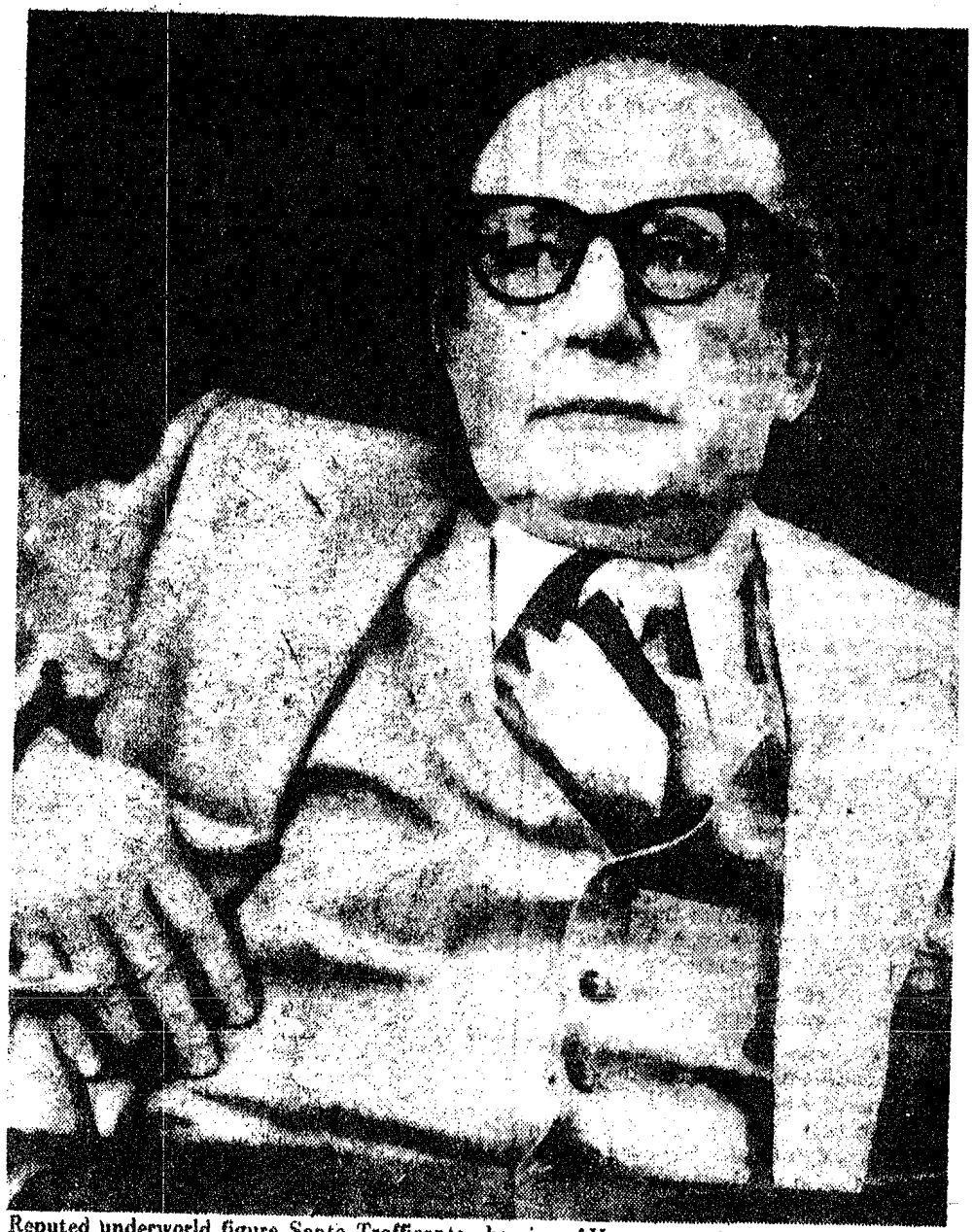
— Did he know Rosselli? Or Giancana?

— Did he know Jack Ruby, who killed Lee Harvey Oswald after Oswald was arrested for Kennedy's murder? While imprisoned in Cuba was he visited by Ruby?

Did he ever meet CIA representatives to "discuss the assassinations of various world leaders, including Castro?"

Trafficante, who was jailed in Cuba after Castro seized his Havana gambling enterprises, was directed by a committee subpoena to bring a variety of documents "from June 1955 to December 1964, relating to attempts to assassinate or the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and relating to groups or organizations known as ALPHA 66, International Anticommunist Brigade, No-Name key group, and the Cuban Revloutionary Council and relating to your release from prison in Havana, Cuba."

He brought none of the items.



Reputed underworld figure Santo Trafficante waits to appear as witness at yesterday's hearing of House committee probing President Kennedy's assassination. (AP photo)